

Leonard's Life Finds Better Course

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

"Leonard had spent most of his adult life in prison. I believe he had been in jail from age 12 until age 36," describes Wayne Brown, educational specialist of the Confidence Club.

"He was prone to violent behavior and would often speak in tongues," Brown relates.

Leonard was suffering from a disabling mental illness. His past and experiences had resulted in such a high degree of deviant behavior that he was not able to function in society. The balance of Leonard's life would have probably continued as it had been. He was periodically locked up in Memorial Hospital's mental ward or from time to time institutionalized in State mental health facilities such as Broughton.

However, fortunately Leonard's life found a better course when he was referred to the Confidence Club, a self-help County-supported organization in Charlotte. When he became a member, he was able to choose between three areas of low stress jobs: kitchen, maintenance or clerical. The work is volunteer but he would have to report each day from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. He could also participate in fundraising activities and extra activities such as bowling or going to the beach.

Leonard would have to follow the conduct code of the club. If he was involved in a fight, he would be suspended from work for a week. It was also his responsibility to take his medication.

"Today, Leonard runs the snack bar efficiently," states Brown. "There are no problems with his behavior. He is completely trustworthy and he reports to work at 8 a.m. promptly each morning. If you were to meet him now you'd say he is one of the sweetest persons."

Brown has good things to say about almost all of the 30-45 people who are members of the Confidence Club. They range in age between the early 20s to 50s, some are college graduates, others are high school graduates, and others have not completed junior high. They have all been, at one



Wayne Brown
Educational specialist

time, certified mentally ill, though the illnesses differ in type and severity, and they have all been referred to the Confidence Club by a licensed professional.

The Confidence Club, the first and only facility of its kind in Charlotte, there are 20 throughout the state of North Carolina, once operated out of the Mental Health Building on Billingsley Road. Recently, they acquired a historical home in which to house their facilities. It is located at 801 Sunnyside Avenue.

The Clubhouse employs Brown, an educational specialist, also two social workers and one nurse. They are there to assist the members of the club when necessary. "We don't babysit them," comments Brown. "They run the place themselves. We are there just in case something they are not able to handle comes up."

The purpose of the Confidence Club is to help people who've suffered from mental illness to become capable and productive members of society again. "People who have nervous breakdowns often forget how to do many things. Also, if they've been given shock treatment, a whole segment of their memory may be blocked out. It's very difficult for them to become fully functional," explains Brown.

"Left as they are, they become very dependent. They usually live on

Social Security benefits or S.S.I. Without a job, they begin to feel useless - without a sense of purpose. Or they are ill-treated by others. Many live in rooming houses where they may not have heat. They are often overcharged for things. Some people think they can do anything to a mentally ill person, if they believe no one cares about them."

The Confidence Club is a place these disabled and discarded persons can re-learn the customs of society. They learn to hold a steady job and cope with its responsibilities. They learn to manage their money, find living quarters, and handle their necessities. In other words, they learn to live in the world again.

"The key to the success of the club is that the members are around people with similar problems and they know they are accepted. They are comfortable here and the jobs give them a sense of being productive," Brown informs.

Take, for instance, Bob. He was a graduate of Appalachian State, a member of a very wealthy family. But somewhere along the way Bob succumbed to schizophrenic behavior.

"He was extremely withdrawn and lethargic, totally non-productive. When you'd talk to him he would just sit and stare, making you feel very uneasy," Brown describes.

"Now, Bob is a model member," boasts Brown. "He is on the Hospitality Committee. He welcomes new members and shows them around the facilities. He works in the clerical unit that puts together a bi-monthly newsletter."

Bob was very helpful during the Confidence Club's recent open house. "It was very exciting," comments Brown.

In April or May of this year, the Confidence Club will develop a job placement department. "We will go out and secure low stress jobs for the members. Many of them already have begun asking for jobs outside the club. But we don't encourage them to find jobs on their own. Many jobs are high stress and we'd hate for them to go out and fail."

According To Dr. Alvarado

Food Addictions Just As Real As Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco Addictions

By Audrey C. Lodato
Post Staff Writer

Are you a chocoholic? Can your day not begin until you've had several cups of coffee? Do you reach for a candy bar or other sweets during the afternoon and get "antsy" if you can't have one?

Pregnant women are not the only ones subject to cravings for particular foods. While not every craving is a sign of addiction, food addictions do create cravings, naturopathic physician Dr. Gil Alvarado remarked during a recent interview.

"Someone who has an addiction craves it (the food she or he is addicted to) all the time," Dr. Alvarado explained. "People can have food addictions just like they have alcohol addictions, cigarette addictions, and drug addictions. An addiction can come from either a physiological or a psychological-sociological base," he continued. "Invariably, both of these will be involved. We're not compartmentalized people. What happens on a physical level is not separated from the psychological level."

According to Alvarado, the body tries to tell us what it needs, but its messages are sometimes misinterpreted. He told of a study involving young children who were given free rein over what they ate from a table of unprocessed foods. Over the course of a month, the children chose a balanced diet, even though on any particular day they might have eaten only one or two types of food. At the end of the first month, other foods such as sweets, soft drinks, and processed foods were added to the table. Immediately, the children gravitated toward these foods. When this happened, said Alvarado, "they lost their innate sense of balance," and no longer ate a nutritious diet. He theorized that the new foods set them up to crave stimulants. These cravings, it would seem, overrode the body's natural messages.



Dr. Gil Alvarado
...Many causes of cravings

Food allergies sometimes cause cravings for the very food to which the person is allergic, the naturopath noted. Other factors include a weak digestive tract that craves simple carbohydrates, such as sugar and refined flour, which are easy to digest; weakness in another part of the body which may need to be stimulated; hypoglycemia; diabetes; social habits associated with fun (associations often built and nurtured by advertising); and associations learned by having been rewarded with sweets as a child. Alvarado commented, "Some people eat because they're depressed, and then become depressed because they eat." Such circular reactions can easily maintain a craving for particular foods.

Interestingly, when the body needs B vitamins, he explained, it craves something sweet, because foods that are innately sweet have B vitamins. If, however, you feed it processed sugar, not only don't you get the needed vitamins, but you also deplete your already low supply of B vitamins because they are

necessary to metabolize sugars. Thus, you create a downward spiral.

Dr. Alvarado also asserted that a food such as chocolate, which contains both sugar and caffeine, will stimulate the adrenal glands; these glands will be depleted, however, with regular use of caffeine.

Although the problem of overweight as a whole cannot be blamed on addictions to various foods, those involved in well-known weight-loss programs agree that food addictions can pose a serious problem.

Jean Pigg, a diet instructor for Weight Watchers, knows that from experience. She recounted her own "cold-turkey" withdrawal from Pepsi after years of drinking "many more than two or three" a day.

Several participants from Overeaters Anonymous, who did not wish their identities to be revealed, also spoke about addictions. One stated, "I go into a depression like an alcoholic when I'm coming off a sugar high. I stay depressed for three days. A friend gets depressed for two weeks." She added that she knows of several alcoholics who, when they stopped drinking, became addicted to certain foods.

Another OA member referred to her "trigger foods," things she "can't eat just one of." These foods, she stated, set off her particular addiction.

When I began interviewing for this article, I secretly hoped to find a simple solution to my own case of "chocohollism." Alas, apparently there is no easy solution. According to all the people I talked with, self-discipline, determination, and a change of eating habits are all going to have to be involved. As I left his office at the end of our interview, I told Dr. Alvarado, "Well, I guess I'll have to go home and finish that jar of chocolate chips before I can get started."

That, I accomplished. I'm still waiting for the determination.

Public Hearing Set For Mecklenburg County

RALEIGH — A North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposal to widen Arrowood Road from I-77 to NC-49 in Charlotte will be discussed at a public hearing February 12.

The hearing will be at 7:30 p.m. in the cafeteria of Olympic High School located on Sandy Porter Road just outside of Charlotte.

Department personnel will be at the hearing to explain the proposed project, right-of-way requirements and procedures, housing relocation advisory assistance and the Federal Highway Administration's involvement in federal-aid projects.

Plans call for two additional lanes with a 30-foot grass median and a 10-foot shoulder on the northbound roadway


will be three lanes with curb and gutter. The present 60-foot right of way will be expanded to 120 feet with construction easements.

The public is invited to attend the hearing and make comments, ask questions or submit material pertaining to the project. Additional material may be submitted until February 22 to George E. Wells, manager of highway design, NCDOT, P.O. Box 25261, Raleigh, N. C. 27611.

A map of the proposed widening project and right of way and copies of the traffic engineering report are available for public review at the NCDOT district office on Hickory-Nevel Road and the office of Randy Jones, 600 E. Trade Street in Charlotte.

For additional information about the hearing, contact W. A. Garrett Jr., public hearing officer, NCDOT, P.O. Box 25261, Raleigh, N. C. 27611 or call (919) 733-3544.

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